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THE
D E F E C T S
AND
D A N G E R
OF A
P H A R I S A I C A L
R I G H T E O U S N E S S.

A S E R M O N

PREACHED

AT GLASGOW JULY 7th, 1751.

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G L A S G O W :

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M D C C L I.



MATTHEW V. 20.

FOR I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT EXCEPT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS SHALL EXCEED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, YE SHALL IN NO CASE ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

THAT the first great end and design of our blessed Saviour's mission was to introduce into the world a more refin'd and perfect purity of heart and uniform integrity of manners, to be derived from a more rational and consistent scheme of pleasing the Deity, than either the Scribes and Pharisees had conceived, or the Pagans pretended to, appears from the whole tenor of the discourse upon the mount.

AT the time of his appearance up-

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on earth the people of God was infected and almost totally over-run with disguised and specious immoralities, a set of crafty pretenders to extraordinary holiness, the Scribes and Pharisees.

THESE men had vitiously perverted the sacred laws of God, and destroyed all the natural force of religion by their plausible glosses, and corrupt traditions.

FROM these self-deceiving hypocrites the holy Gospel of Christ was corrupted with a continual and most perverse disposition. The divine Simplicity of moral precepts alarm'd and confounded them, as it exposed the folly of vain traditions of men, by which they had deluded a thoughtless people, and themselves too in the end.

THUS unmask'd, and detected in a gross double-dealing, in the first unguarded sally of their resentment they strove to fix upon our Saviour a reproach, that was sure to rebound upon themselves. They accused him of destroying the vigour of the Law, and rendering the Commands of God of none effect.

To this impotent effort of malice our Saviour makes a reply, not likely indeed to remove their voluntary errors, but adapted to give satisfaction to every candid searcher of truth. He appeals to the strictest scrutiny of unprejudiced reason, whether his doctrine tended in the least to the destruction of the true spirit and substance of the Jewish law, or did not rather tend to bring them to a perfection in piety and vir-

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tue, with a notion of which the Law had hitherto fail'd of inspiring them tho' calculated to prepare men for it

" Think not, says he, that I am come

" to destroy the Law and the Prophets

" I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil

" fill;" and soon after, " For I say unto

" you, that except your righteousness

" shall exceed the righteousness of the

" Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no

" case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

" ven."

THESE words addressed immediately to his disciples, might be thus applied in an enlarged sense, to those against whom they were level'd.

' You are altogether in the dark

' your precipitate opinions of me and

' my doctrine. I am so far from intending

' any injury to the Law and the Pro

phets, so far from contradicting or opposing them, that I highly esteem and applaud their moral tendency. Far be it from me to lessen your veneration for a Law whose sanction is divine: no; I would rather persuade you to encrease your respect for the spiritual, and now the only essential substance of it. I impose no doctrine, I enforce no duty upon you, which is not virtually contain'd in your Law, tho' from some things, which were but obscurely hinted in types and shadows before, I now strip off the mystic veil, in order to display them in full light; and many things by you basely disguised and misrepresented I restore to their primitive standard of simplicity and truth.

KNOW then, that I am come to

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‘ enlighten the world in the great affair
‘ of their eternal interest. I am come
‘ to re-establish true morality upon its
‘ just foundation, and to clear it from
‘ a cumbersome load of superfluities
‘ which have well nigh buried it in ruins.
‘ My precepts of Meekness and
‘ Humility, of universal Charity, and
‘ Integrity of Heart, of the Love and
‘ Fear of God in spirit and in truth are
‘ indeed adapted to expose your hypocritical
‘ pretences to sanctity. For I am
‘ come, in short, to cleanse the moral
‘ Law of Moses from all the adulterous
‘ mixtures, by which you Pharisees
‘ have tainted its originally-clear, un-
‘ sullied spring; that you and all the
‘ world may see and know, that God
‘ does not that idol, you esteem and represent
‘ him to be, that he delights not in an

of those formal rites, sacrifices and oblations, which resemble not his pure and holy nature, that all your false ways, all your ceremonial, insincere addresses he utterly abhors, unattended, as they are, with an hearty Love and true Respect.'

THIS comment upon a very remarkable declaration of our Saviour will naturally lead us to observe, "That a Pharisaical, affected, or merely external righteousness is not sufficient to procure us acceptance with God."

To enforce this important doctrine I shall

I. ENQUIRE who these Scribes and Pharisees were, what their righteousness was, and what were the chief defects of it.

II. I shall consider what manner of

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righteousness Christ here requires us to be possessed of; it must be such a one as exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

III. and lastly, I shall briefly represent the great danger denounced in the text, if it does not, " I say unto you, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

FIRST then, the Scribes of the Law were officers established among the Jews after their return from Babylon for the writing and interpreting holy Scripture. In our Saviour's time they had raised themselves by slow and unperceived encroachments to so high credit and esteem as to have the pre-eminence even of the priests and sacrificers. Their decisions were received with the same respect as the Law of God itself

and indeed in all their decisions they adhered as closely as possible to the dead letter of the Law, and so most commonly lost the spirit of it.

THE Pharisees were an austere and gloomy sect, separated from the rest of the Jews (whose conversation they disdain'd as ungodly and prophane) by the severity of their manners, by their professing a higher degree of sanctity, and a more rigid and religious observation of the Law. But the plain letter of the Law they corrupted by an impure mixture of innumerable traditions equally destructive of the true spirit of it.

FROM this account of what the Scribes and Pharisees were we may in part collect what was their righteousness, and what the principal defects of it.

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THEIR righteousness consisted, first, in a speculative knowledge of the truths and doctrines of religion. They were exceedingly well instructed in the ceremonial part of the Law of Moses, and they were no strangers to the Theory even of the moral part ; but they were altogether deficient in the sincere and conscientious practice of it. They knew a great deal ; but their knowledge, instead of sinking deep into their hearts, and influencing their wills and affections throughout, only floated useless in their heads, and spread a superficial polish on their outward appearance, which served to conceal the ambitious designs they were carrying on under the mask of religion.

AGAIN, not to disappoint their low ambition of popular applause, they care-

fully kept clear of all notorious and scandalous vices; to escape the infamy they shun'd the guilt of flagrant injustice, extortion or adultery; at least so we have it from their own mouths, and so they made the world believe.

BESIDES, (to allow their righteousness all the advantages it might justly claim,) they were extremely constant at their devotions. They allow'd no business of whatever importance to their own or their neighbour's welfare to supersede their daily attendance at their synagogues, and at the temple of Jerusalem, on which they ignorantly doted, as on the place, from whence alone the Deity dispensed his favours. Their prayers upon these occasions were of an unusual length, and being commonly the hasty product of an over-heated fancy,

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were uttered with a kind of self-sufficiency peculiar to themselves, as they imagined their intimate friendship with God might entitle them to address him with some familiarity.

MOREOVER, from the rigour and severity of their frequent fasts, from their pompous munificence in bestowing their alms, from their seemingly profound respect for their priests and Levites, and scrupulous exactness in paying them to the full extent of their legal demands, verily they had their reward of glory upon earth, whatever they might expect from heaven.

IN short, to close and set a seal to their righteous character, they were very diligent in reading the Scriptures, very attentive in hearing them read and expounded, most critically punctual in

performing each particular external rite,
and extravagantly nice in the ceremo-
nious observance of the Sabbath, so
wondrously precise were they in this
particular, as to be incens'd at our Sa-
viour's disciples for plucking a few ears
of corn, and at our Saviour himself for
bestowing with a word health to the
lame and sight to the blind on the Sab-
bath-day.

AND now, might not all this at the
first glance be deem'd a superlative de-
gree of righteousness? Indeed a very
superficial glance it must be, not to per-
ceive many fatal, and one fundamen-
tal defect, that ran thro' the whole te-
nour of it.

FOR if this specious shew of excel-
lency was utterly devoid of sincerity
and purity of heart, the very life and

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soul of religion, it was shamefully wanting in its first principles.

Now, from their omission of the weightier matters of the Law, Judgment, Faith, and Mercy, we may conclude how little their hearts were concerned in the observance of vain ceremonies and arbitrary discipline. If they really had the glory of God, and the good of mankind at heart, how could they to neglect what tended most to promote them? A sincere and right aim and intention was evidently wanting here, and we need not wonder at their bitter enmity to Christ and his doctrine for making the discovery. He overthrew their long-established claim to the peculiar good graces of the Deity. They stood convicted by him of gross and impious delusion. He taught

that their long prayers and bodily severities were of no avail to atone for a settled course of miscarriages of life, much less to merit eternal happiness, without a thorough reformation of heart.

AND this leads me in the II. place to consider what manner of righteousness Christians must be possess'd of in order to exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, by which the defects of the latter will be still more fully and compleatly exposed.

AND first, it must be founded in a truly pious and virtuous disposition of the heart. An exterior garb of sanctity made the Pharisee, the splendid pride of a deep knowledge with a masterly compass of thought form the Philosopher; but 'tis the integrity of the heart

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that chiefly makes the Christian. Our actions and intentions, thoughts and inclinations, as well as our external and verbal professions, must all alike be animated by a sincere love of God, and genuine concern for his honour and glory. From hence will necessarily arise a conscientious discharge of all the duties he has enjoyn'd us, without regarding the opinion or favour of the world, or any sordid interest of our own.

IT is the pure heart and clean heart, it is an honest, and ingenuous frame of mind, that will obtain for our faith, our prayers, and our religious affections, acceptance at the Throne of Grace. This is the only sacrifice, which God is well pleased. A mere external habit of devotion, without a true Christian spirit, is a direct mock

a Pharisaical Righteousness. 19

of that God, who has so expressly declared that he will not be worshipped but in Spirit and in Truth.

FAITH itself without works of love is dead.

BAPTISM unattended in it's consequences with a Christian purity of affections and manners, is of less avail than the least significant among the Jewish ceremonies.

To approach the Lord at his holy table without a settled purpose of impressing upon our minds a deeper sense of his infinite mercies in Christ, and of our own obligation to concur with his gracious designs in our favour, by enlivening our Faith with Virtue, is only adding to our former guilt the dreadful aggravation of an attempt, no less im-

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pious than absurd, to deceive infinite
Wisdom.

PRAYER, devout, attentive, and affectionate prayer is of great efficacy to render us fit objects of the favours of Heaven; but in order to be effectual with God, it must first exert its salutary influence upon ourselves, by cherishing in our minds good sentiments and pious dispositions. In prayer we must have a lively sense of the awful presence of that God, to whom we are accountable for our whole conduct, and on whom our being and our well-being both now and evermore depend. If in consequence of this we perform it in such a manner as to confirm and strengthen in our minds the principles of faith, hope and trust in God, and of justice and charity one to another, then and then only do we

fully answer the great end and design of this duty.

To frequent the Church assembled for divine worship, to pay to the supreme Lord of heaven and earth a solemn and public acknowledgment of his infinite Goodness, Power, and Wisdom, is an homage most justly due to our sovereign Benefactor. The neglect of it no doubt is highly criminal, the produce of extreme ingratitude and stupidity. But here to put on the unmeaning form and habit of devout supplicants, with minds unconscious of the sacred work we are about; nay, at the very instant we are addressing the Almighty Searcher of Hearts with our lips, with uplifted eyes and hands, to continue in the secret service of Mammon; what is this, but deriding God to

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his face? This, tho' perhaps not so prevailing a crime at present, is certainly a far more heinous one, than that of those insipid, senseless, but too fashionable triflers, who upon these occasions pay the Deity a cold, complemental visit, but wou'd blush to be seen shewing him any real marks of respect or affection.

WHEN we fast, merely to disfigure our faces and with a delusive air of humility to feed our spiritual pride, to perform acts of seeming charity with the same low intent to gratify a foolish vanity; to keep the Sabbath scrupulously as a day of rest from business, without employing it in a due attention to the one thing needful; nay really to observe the Lord's day most devoutly, and to think of acquiring by that means a fund

of merit that may atone for the sins of the week past, with a balance in our favour sufficient to carry us on securely to the next Sabbath-day; what is all this, but mere Pharisaical righteousness, directly the reverse of real piety?

TRUE Religion is a compleat transcript of the Divine Nature: "Be ye holy as I am holy, saith the Lord."

A truly Christian righteousness must then be perfectly entire and unreserved.

The moral and substantial part of our Religion claims our first regard, then the ceremonial; tho' to the disgrace of human nature an instance is seldom seen of a fervent zeal in the cause of the former, while the defence of the latter is generally carried on with much heat and fury.

THE preference here given to mo-

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ality and purity of heart does not in the least detract from the real merit of external devotion and bodily worship. They are indeed essential to Christianity, being strongly recommended by the precepts and example of our Blessed Lord himself, and absolutely necessary to keep up a face and sense of religion among men; so that we may safely conclude, that the man who renounces these, or endeavours to bring them into discredit, is a secret ill-wisher to religion at the heart.

BUT this we may depend upon as a maxim of undoubted certainty: If our actions only carry a form of godliness without the power of it, all we aim at in these acts of seeming piety, is, either to deceive ourselves or others, either to evade the remorse of a wounded con-

a Pharisaical Righteousness. 25

science, or only to save appearances with the world. On the other hand, sincere respect for religion will necessarily produce a desire of recommending ourselves to our Maker ; and a hearty desire of pleasing God will as effectually call forth into action every duty, which lies in our power, and give us generous esteem and emulation for those, that exceed it.

HERE then is a certain test and mark of assurance, by which we may safely determine whether our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees: When we have right and holy ends in all our religious performances, ends suitable to the known perfections of the Deity, ends conformable to the purity of the Christian constitution, ends truly and in fact con-

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ducive to our spiritual improvement and perfection in moral goodness, the only commendable motive for all eternal acts of worship. When we thus stedfastly and without wavering press toward the mark, we may rejoice in the full confidence of obtaining the invaluable prize we contend for.

I HASTEN now to the last thing proposed, briefly to represent the great danger denounced in the text; if we take up with a Pharisaical righteousness, if we rest in the mere empty form and outsides of obedience, "We shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

THIS peremptory threat'ning of our Lord and Saviour extends itself to all persons of every age or station, persuasion, sect, or party, who have

braced the religion of the Gospel, without living up to the spirit of its moral precepts.

By the Kingdom of Heaven is frequently understood in the New Testament, the strict observance of those refined rules of piety and virtue, which were enforced by the authority of God in Christ Jesus, and are absolutely necessary to be conformed to in order to obtain his favour and acceptance. This was the kingdom of heaven, which St. John the Baptist proclaim'd to be near at hand. This is the kingdom of God, whose establishment we are taught to implore in the divine form of prayer, when we say, "Thy kingdom come." In this sense then our Saviour declares, that except to the outward profession of faith in him you add that in-

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tegrity and purity of heart, which was wanting in the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will be deficient in the very essentials of Christianity, and consequently you will have no covenanted title to the blessings and privileges annexed to the character of a true Christian, you will be utterly incapable of inheriting everlasting life.

So that it is of little use to enquire critically, whether by the kingdom of heaven is here meant, (as in other passages of the New Testament) that state of endless uninterrupted joy and felicity reserved in heaven for the spirits of just men made perfect, or that state or degree of righteousness and perfection upon earth, necessary to prepare and fit them for a blessed immortality.

ALL your hope of salvation thro'

a Pharisaical Righteousness. 29

Christ is, in either sense, equally blasted by this decisive and comprehensive declaration, "Except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees."

IN this irrevocable sentence you hear your certain doom, if it fails to awaken you to a just sense of your duty. It was pronounced by the Mediator of the new covenant, that divine Mediator, appointed by the supreme Author of all Goodness to reclaim a sinful and degenerate race of creatures from the paths of vice and misery, and to lead them into those of virtue and happiness; that same eternally rever'd and beloved Redeemer and Judge, at whose tribunal every soul of man shall one day appear naked and undisguis'd, and there

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undergo a final, irreversible judgment according to his works.

NOR is this sanction of our blessed Lord the arbitrary imposition of Sovereign Power; it is the genuine result of infinite Wisdom and Goodness. It is a kind forewarning of the necessary effect of an aversion to a truly pious and virtuous disposition of heart. God created man in his own image to be a partaker of an eternity of bliss with himself. But if we destroy this god-like image in our souls by an habitually-evils byass of temper to the debasing works of darkness, we divest ourselves of that very qualification, which is the main ground-work and foundation of our future happiness, we are not meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

TO CONCLUDE,

OUR duty, and our danger in neglecting it, are both clearly set before us. Without a sincere and uniform obedience, we are utterly cut off from all hope of the Divine Favour, we shall infallibly be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Does not each guilty conscience strongly echo back this sentence of our Saviour, and tell the low-designing hypocrite, in a voice that knows no fallacy or disguise; 'Listen to thy doom and tremble! for except the whole frame and temper of thy heart and mind be reform'd and thoroughly re-new'd, the doors of mercy will be eternally barr'd against thee!'

LET us then instantly awake unto true righteousness, a righteousness, that may enable us to receive the kingdom of

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God as a little child, that is, with humility, openness and simplicity of heart; those excellent dispositions, on which all proficiency in piety, and improvement in virtue are founded; a righteousness that may abound in the fruit of the Spirit, and be productive of a sincere devotion, habitual temperance, and universal charity, with an integrity superior to all temptation or distress; righteousness, in short, animated by real inward esteem and genuine love of virtue, and whose pure and noble aims and intentions all center in a true concern for the glory of God, and hearty desire of recommending ourselves to his favour.

SUCH a righteousness as this will secure to us a constant peace and serenity of mind in time of health, an u

a Pharisaical Righteousness. 33

ailing support and consolation upon
the bed of pain, strong heavenly beams
of hope and joy at the gloomy hour of
death. Such a righteousness as this will,
through the mercy of God, be accepted
at the great Day of Judgment, and
finally be rewarded with an incorrup-
tible Crown of Glory in the Life to
come.

Now to God, &c.

T H E E N D,

A Thoroughly Righteous
Report and Conclusion upon
the true thing being
represented in the bloody
and such righteousness
the glory of God be
the great day of Judgment
be rewarded with an incorrupt
Crown of glory in the life to

Now to God, &c.



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